**<u>The right message, for the right audience – using our communications plan</u>**

**What is a communications plan?**

A communications plan is a detailed plan which defines the approach that a project will use to communicate with colleagues, students, and other stakeholders.  It helps ensure that our audiences are aware of the information they require, by formally defining who should receive what, when the information should be delivered, and what channels will be used to deliver the information.  It also includes key messages and identifies any issues / risks which should be signed off by the project lead.

**Why use a communications plan?**

Developing a communication plan can help to focus your message, so that you can create clear messages that will influence your target audience.  A plan will also help you to manage the delivery of communications against agreed timescales.  By creating a communications plan, you'll set the framework for monitoring the success of the campaign.

**Your approach to communications**

Be open about important messages and changes that need communicating to your main stakeholders.  Offer colleagues and students the chance to feed back through a variety of methods, and the opportunity to get involved in the development of internal initiatives.  Be proactive in your approach and tell people information before you are asked for it.

**Full and summarised communications plans**

We have provided two versions of our communications plan.  The full version contains all the information you will need to consider in order to run a full communications campaign for a project. For smaller pieces of work, you can focus on the key aspects of the plan – your key messages, stakeholder analysis, and communications tactics – and use the summarised communications plan.

<u>**Our communications plan explained**</u>

This guide will take you through each stage of the communications plan template, so that you will be able to create your own plan for implementation.

**Section 1 - Why?  Project summary, background & objectives**
Including a background to the project ensures the project lead / team has a shared understanding of the context of the project.  For example, if you are communicating organisational change, outline why the decision was made, the initial impact, and any activities already happening.  This will help you develop the key messages later.

The Project Summary should also be used to share your communications objectives.  These will keep the plan focussed, and having written objectives allows you to measure the success of the plan. Think about:

- What is the purpose for communicating key program messages
- What do you want to accomplish?
- Who – and where – is you audience?
- What outcomes are you looking for? (ie raising staff awareness to 70%; footfall of 300 at event)

Try to make the objectives SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Agreed, Realistic, and Time-bound.  Try to have no more than five or six.

**Section 2 - What? Key messages**
This section should be used to set out the single most important messages that make the project truly engaging to your target audience(s.)  Support this with key reasons for why they should believe it.  Your messages should be clear (free from jargon,) concise (can you say it in less than six seconds?) and consistent.

As circumstances change, you may need to update your key messages.  Make sure these reflect the changes and what these changes mean to the audience, and ensure they reinforce the overall narrative.

You may also need different messages to be shared with different audiences - for example, if you are communicating to experts, they may require a more detailed message.

**Section 3 - Who? Stakeholder analysis**
Think carefully about your intended audience, which may comprise several groups.  Many audience members may also fall into more than one group.  Common stakeholder groups include professional services ; academics; colleagues on a particular campus; colleagues specific to a college or service; line managers; colleagues on specific paygrades; or senior managers.

Once you've identified who you need to communicate with, you need to think about what you want each audience to:

**Think**: The project is valuable; it will make a difference; the University is investing.
**Feel**: They feel proud to work at the University; engaged in the campaign; included and valued.
**Do**: We want them to support the project; buy into its aims; attend events; visit webpages.

Think about what outcomes you want to achieve – do you want to drive a change in the way that people think or feel, or do you want to change how they act as a result of the communication?

A more detailed stakeholder analysis toolkit is available on the Internal communications webpages.

**Section 4 - How will the campaign be assessed?**
How will you measure the campaign's success?  Evaluation should be ongoing throughout delivery of the campaign, which will give you the opportunity to change tactics based on this evaluation.  Or, it could take place at the end of the project – perhaps by evaluating pre-registration figures, attendance numbers at events, a post-campaign survey, pulse checks, website visits, feedback, or the number of Rumourbuster submissions received.

**Section 5 - Key issues and questions**
Think about the project risks, and how planning communications can mitigate these.  For example, is the project likely to make large groups of colleagues unhappy?  If the campaign is introducing new technology, will the technology be ready in time?  We can help mitigate against risks by creating clear and honest messaging, by being upfront to avoid confusion, and by manage expectations.

**Section 6 - Timeline**
What are the project's milestones and key dates?  When will you need to communicate over the course of the project?  The timeline will vary for every project, but by having a list of key moments, you will have a better understanding of what can be communicated, and when.  For example, is there a senior meeting, public or staff consultation or exhibition?  Detail it in this section.

**Section 7 - Communications Tactics**
Here you set out how you intend to run your communications campaign, tying together the rest of this plan into actions.  Plan your activities to announce your key messages, and base them around the timeline.  Activities may be newsletters, emails, websites, posters, or something else:

| Date/Deadline | Event/Activity | Key messages | Audience | Owner/s | Completed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monday 15th | Weekly Bulletin | The project goes live next week | All staff | | |
| Tuesday 23rd | All staff meeting | Project live –what you need to do | All staff in college | | |
| Tuesday 23rd | Local newsletter | The project goes live next week. | All staff in college | | |
| Wednesday 24th | Website | Details of the project, more info | All staff | | |
| Wednesday 24th | Posters | About the project | All staff in building | | |
| Monday 22nd | Weekly Bulletin | The project is now live – more info on website | All staff | | |

**Section 8 - Budget**
Set out the budget, cost centre and project code, and the lead approver(s) for this campaign.  You may also want to include some details of costings and quotes – for example, how much a video may cost to produce, a quote from the Design Studio for flyers, or room hire for an exhibition.